

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

UNIVERSITY MOULOUD MAMMERI TIZI-OUZOU

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كلية الآداب واللغات



**Domaine :** Lettres et Langues Etrangères

**Filière :** Langue Anglaise

**Spécialité :** Littérature Comparée

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of Master in English**

**Title:**

**Space and Resistance in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and  
Fatima Mernissi's The Veil and the Male Elite (1991)**

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Nº D'Ordre :

Nº De série :

Promotion: 2017/2018

To

My family, especially my parents, brothers, sisters and their children.

My best friends.

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**Acknowledgement:**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Mrs SEDDIKI Sadia for her support, guidance and assistance. My thanks go also to the panel of examiners for having accepted to examine and evaluate my work. Last but not least, I am grateful to my family, my best friend for her encouragement, patience and understanding.

## **Abstract**

*This study aims to deal with the concept of space in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and Fatima Mernissi's collection of essays The Veil and the Male Elite (1991). To support my research, I have relied on Jurgen Habermas's theory of space The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into Category of Bourgeois Society (1989). I have dealt with the authors' biographies and the circumstances that influenced them to become writers. They portrayed their female characters in struggle with the patriarchal society and different conditions that deepened their distancing from the public sphere. I have also discussed the way they raise the issue of private and public sphere in their works in the light of the historical and literary context that influenced the writing of both Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and The Veil and the Male Elite (1991). Finally, I have studied the private and public space in both Woolf's and Mernissi's works. The affinities that gathered both authors is the relationship between space and gender in the context of space theory and the way they express their resistance.*

**Key Words:** *public, private, space, gender, patriarchal, society, resistance.*

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## **I. General Introduction**

A society can be defined as groups of people who share the same values and principles so as to build a community. These groups are under the control of an upper authority so as to preserve order within that community. During the Victorian period, women's roles are either ignored or restricted to domestic duties, such as cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of children. Meanwhile, men has access to politic, economy and even education. Women in Morroco and England during this period were forbidden to attend school and were distanced from the public space which was available only to men. The patriarchal system supported and deepened differences and inequality between men and women. The origin of patriarchy mainly goes back to historical, religious, political, economic and social conditions which have "created the divided interests between men and women."<sup>1</sup> As a result, female figures wanted to change the harsh patriarchal system that isolated women to recover women's role in society.

The feminist movement aimed to achieve and establish equality between men and women. It is divided into three waves. The first wave which started from 1860s to 1920s, aimed to achieve the right of women to vote. Then, came the second wave Feminism in the 1960s. It focused on women's legal rights and equality in the private and public sphere. As a continuation to the second wave, the third wave begun in 1990s. The enormous changes that occurred in the second wave helped women to fight the organizations that divided the public space that is restricted only to men and the private one that is limited to women. They express their resistance to their exclusion from public space.

Virginia Woolf and Fatima Mernissi appeared as two of the feminist representatives of the modern era. Virginia Woolf, who was born in a Victorian environment in which men and women had two separate spheres, was against this patriarchal culture that excluded women from public space. Through her writings, Woolf urges women's resistance against patriarchal society.

Her main focus was on women and their struggle to get access to the public sphere. Hermione Lee notes that “the conflict between private and public -was- one of the main subjects in her writing life.”<sup>4</sup>

Fatima Mernissi, is a Moroccan Feminist who was educated in a Harem environment where men worked in public spheres and women stayed in the private one, and ask for permission before leaving home. She wanted to change the traditions and free women. Throughout Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Mernissi’s *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991), they have dealt with the issue of women from feminist perspective.

### **Review of literature**

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Fatima Mernissi’s *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) have been subject matter for many critics from different perspectives. Within this research, I will focus on the most representative of the two novelists’ critics in relation to the two mentioned novels. Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) has been analyzed by Garcia, C.D., in her article entitled *Decentering Discourse, Self-Centered Politics: Radicalism and the Self in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway*. In this article she argues that “*Mrs. Dalloway* conveys (...) a resistance that is highly political in the sense that it expresses the social creation and imposition of identity on a consciousness that is fluid.”<sup>2</sup> This means that Woolf portrays her female protagonist –Clarissa– as a feminist resistant showing Woolf’s attitude towards feminism.

In her article “*Petrified Mermaids: transcendence and Female Subjectivity in the Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway and André Breton’s Nadja*”, Scott, L remarks that, “She (Clarissa) imagines herself as simultaneously ‘young’ and ‘unspeakably aged’, internal and external, public and private.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Clarissa is in between everything and cannot

occupy a single clear state, neither private nor public. She doesn't know or even recognize whether she belongs to public or private space. This means that women during that period had no recognized space.

In their article "*A Reader Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*", Selden, R, Widdowson, P., & Brooker, P. think that Woolf's contribution to feminism is her notion that: "gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed."<sup>4</sup> This article shows Woolf's major preoccupations in her novel which is the constructed relationships. This means that Woolf's focus was mainly on the relationships which can be changed within society. Thus, gender throughout time shifts. This means that social relations and gender are in development.

Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) has also received critical studies. In an article entitled: *The political Harem by Fatima Mernissi .The Past in a Way that Illuminates the Present and Paints the Prospects for the Future* ,Hassan Makhafi argues that , "Fatima Mernissi is a distinguished researcher in sociology, whose research and studies are dedicated to the cause of women in general... -and- that Islam itself did not practice injustice against women, and what made them live discrimination status within society is the hypocritical understanding of Islam, which was governed by backgrounds not necessarily related to religion."<sup>5</sup> Thus, Mernissi's concern is to correct the incorrect interpretation of Islam towards women.

Another article entitled "*The Political Harem... The Argument of Supporters and Rejecters*", states that "the program "*Out of Text*" highlights in the Sunday episode in this book, and argues that it was published in 1987 in a period that witnessed ideological confusion between the left and the conservative trend."<sup>6</sup> Thus, such a book concerning religion is obviously the subject matter of the critiques of that period.



The sociologist Aisha Halim states that, "Mernissi saw the veil against the contribution of women to public life, and that the rights given to them in the Koran and in normative Islam were interpreted from the popular Islam, which was subjected to parallel political circumstances since the death of the Prophet (PBUH)." <sup>7</sup> Aisha Halim thinks that Mernissi's interpretation of the veil is related to the interpretations from the popular Islam.

The reason which encourages me to undertake this study comes first from my interests in the kind of works studied in comparative literature. Second, although Virginia Woolf and Fatima Mernissi belong to two different cultures, beliefs and speak different languages, it seems that their preoccupations in their works are closely similar. Thus, the two works gather the ideas of space.

### **Issue and Working Hypothesis**

Despite their different geographical and historical backgrounds, Virginia Woolf and Fatima Mernissi share some similarities concerning the circumstances behind writing their two works. To my best knowledge, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) have not been compared. Therefore, in my research I suggest a comparative study between the two works, not in terms of characters and plot but my interest will be focused on the notion of space. What encourages me to deal with this issue, to which little research has been devoted, is to draw parallels between the two works. The purpose for choosing these two writers is to show their affinities in terms of space. In order to achieve my purpose I will rely on Jürgen Habermas's theory of public sphere. The reason for choosing this critical perspective as suitable approach to *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) is because it seems relevant to my investigation.

## Methodological Outline

My research is divided into five sections .The first section is devoted to the general introduction in which I have introduced the purpose of my research and then I have made a Review of the Literature on the two works. In this part, we find the Issue and Working Hypothesis that a comparative study between the mentioned novels is missing. In Methods and Materials I shall present the summaries of both works and Jürgen Habermas's theory of public sphere. The Results section will show my Findings. The discussion section is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the biographies and the circumstances that influence both authors to become writers. The second chapter deals with the historical and literary context that influenced both *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991). Then, the last one will be about private and public space in both Woolf's and Mernissi's works. Finally, I will conclude with a General Conclusion which sums up the general ideas developed in the research work.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Sadiqi Fatima, “*Gender Perception in Moroccan Culture*”, 8 February 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Garcia, C. D. “*Decentering Discourse, Self-Centered Politics: Radicalism and the Self in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway*”. *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, 32(1), p.15-28.2010.

<sup>3</sup>Scott, L.” *Petrified Mermaids: transcendence and female subjectivity in the aesthetics of Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway and André Breton’s Nadja*”. *Textual, Practice*, 28(1), p.121-140.

<sup>4</sup>Selden, R Widdowson, P., &Brooker, P. *A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Pearson: Longman, 2005.

<sup>5</sup>Makhafi Hassan,”*The political harem by Fatima Mernissi .The past in a way that illuminates the present and paints the prospects for the future*” Evening, 20 - 07 -2014.

<sup>6</sup>”*The Political Harem... The argument of supporters and rejecters*”, 23 Nov. 2017.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

## II Method and Materials

### A. Method

As for methodology, I will rely on Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere which is elaborated in his book entitled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962). Through this book, Habermas attempts to deal with the public opinion in Western Europe, and the degeneration of the Bourgeois public sphere. As he points out, "Our investigation presents a stylized picture of the liberal elements of the bourgeois public and of their transformation in the social-welfare state."<sup>1</sup> Habermas's concept "öffentlichkeit" is "public sphere" in English. According to him, the public sphere is "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state."<sup>2</sup> He thinks that the public sphere is an imaginary group of people which doesn't obviously take place in any precise space. He claims that "We call events and occasions 'public' when they are opened to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs."<sup>3</sup> Public Sphere is made up of political discussions and a group of information, such as: public assemblies, meeting halls, parliament and many other public spaces where debates occur. It is a product of freedoms of speech, assembly and the right to participate in political debates.

In order to achieve my purpose, I need first to expose the meaning of each concept apart: public sphere, private sphere and bourgeois public sphere in order to make a distinction between public and private dichotomy. The emergence of public space goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup>C due to the appearance of coffee houses, reading rooms, and the growth of press. Habermas claims that public and private space derive from both Greek and Roman origins. In the ancient Greek times, the previous dichotomy was used to distinguish between the two different spheres which formed the Greek society 'polis' and 'oikos'. The latter were separated but related to one another.<sup>4</sup> The 'polis' refers to public sphere which describes the connections that occur between free citizens

while talking about political area, whereas the ‘oikos’ sphere represents the private sphere where we find the exchanges that take place between free individuals in the domestic area.<sup>5</sup> This shows that the Greek state separated the public life and private life. The participation in political debates was devoted only to masters while women and slaves were excluded. Habermas points out to the development of coffee houses which were concerned with discussing literature. In addition, Habermas asserts that the classical public sphere goes hand in hand with the rise of newspapers and coffee houses that awaken the male bourgeois’ criticism which gives birth to their political power. Habermas argues, “the success of the public sphere was founded on rational-critical discourse.”<sup>6</sup> This means that everyone who can be a participant in this operation shares the skill of communication.

Habermas relates the formation of the ‘public sphere’ during the eighteenth century directly to politics, then the appearance of ‘bourgeois public sphere’ that gathers members of society. They tackle critical debates and discussions about everything relying only on their reason.<sup>7</sup> I will mainly focus on the second feature, bourgeois public sphere, since it meets the center of my analysis of the works of the two authors Woolf and Mernissi who share the characteristics of being both members of bourgeois class .

Although the public sphere is, “an area in social life where individuals can meet to freely discuss public matters, exchange views and knowledge,”<sup>8</sup> scholars assert that the bourgeois public sphere excludes subordinate classes, especially women. The concept of Public Sphere shifts to become the bourgeois public sphere with the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the capitalist state. In addition, Habermas’s perception of the bourgeois public sphere is about rational discussions which becomes an area of interest dominated by the elites and forwards dominates the “public opinion”. The latter changes from free debates and opinion to be modeling clay in the hands of the dominant elites.

## **B- Materials**

### **a- Summary of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)**

*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is a novel about an upper class woman, Clarissa Dalloway in her fifties. She is preparing for a lunch party that she organizes for the sake of her husband's reputation and to serve his career as a politician. The novel portrays the position and the role of women during the Victorian period through the interior perspective of Mrs. Dalloway. Woolf shows the dominance of men in front of women's weakness and exclusion in a typical patriarchal society. Clarissa is portrayed as having nothing to do except organizing parties representing a typical Victorian "woman-angel of the house". The novel portrays Clarissa's loss of identity caused by the act of marriage. The latter marginalizes her and deprives her of her free identity. She cannot even communicate freely with her husband.

Woolf shows the hypocrisy of the Victorian society. Peter Walsh who comes to visit Clarissa after a long journey to India, functions as a stimulus that awakens her past memories in Burton, with Sally Seton and Peter her beloved. She remembers her rejection of Peter's demand of marriage because she wanted privacy and independence of her own. She preferred to marry Richard Dalloway in a way to satisfy her ambitions in life especially to be recognized and to gain respect within that patriarchal society. Clarissa suffers from loneliness and despair because of the patriarchal society that limited women to public sphere.

Woolf sheds light on the dominance of the male elite. Rezia, the wife of Septimus, was obliged to obey her husband's rejection to have a child because, according to him, it is unjust and inhuman to give birth to a child in such a cruel world. It is a way to explain that women outside their career and outside their feminist duties are not recognized but excluded from the public space. At the end of the novel, Septimus dies and leaves his wife alone without a child

in a foreign country and Clarissa Dalloway remains alone. This shows the extent to which society which worships men's power and dominance is a failure.

#### **b. Summary of *The Veil and the Male Elite 1991***

“Can a woman be a leader of Muslims?”<sup>9</sup> This is the opening question asked by Mernissi in her collection of essays while going to a grocery in Morocco. Meanwhile, a schoolteacher reports this hadith in a response to Mernissi's question: “Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity!”<sup>10</sup> Mernissi left the grocery displeased, feeling the need to dig in the origins of that hadith to bring evidence to its authenticity. To find the identity of those who plunge woman into the private space under the flag of religious faith, the author carries out an investigation through the religious history of the Prophet (PBUH). She describes the real circumstances in the Medina of the seventh century and the wives of the Prophet who discussed politics and went to war. In order to preserve male domination, scholars of Islam ('ulamâ') would have manipulated the sacred message.

Mernissi describes the first community of Medina; women who were present and significant in the public sphere. Mernissi draws an authentic picture of the harem of the Prophet which is based on a re-reading of the Sira. This shows that the author investigated to better understand the life of the Prophet. According to her, the prosperous period of the "political harem" knew an end after the coming of Caliph 'Omar, of the tribe of Quraysh. He became the orator for men who opposed the egalitarian policy of the Prophet. These circumstances marked the beginning of the era of depriving women from their rights which were different from men's ones.

Mernissi's work *The Veil and the Male Elite (1991)* is divided into two parts, each part contains four chapters. The first deals with the sacred text and its use as a political weapon.

Mernissi explains how the Hadith has served and still serves as a political weapon after the clearing up of the historical memory. According to Mernissi, a very large number of Hadiths are used today for biased purposes. That is, nearly two centuries after Mohammed's death. At the end, she deals with the dishonesty of many misogynistic Hadiths that determined the place given to women in Muslim societies.

The second part of the book is devoted to the analysis of the social, political and ideological climate during the period of the establishment of Muslim society, the debates about the freedom of women, gender equality and women's involvement in politics and public life. The positions between reformists and conservatives start to appear around the question of wearing the veil. The situation of women in Islam and, in general, the relations between men and women are determined by the Sharia -Muslim law-. Mernissi attacks misogynistic Hadiths and some verses of the Koran that have and continue to have a significant weight in the determination of the place reserved for women in Muslim societies. It is Abu Bakra who reported, "The people who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity!".<sup>11</sup> This Hadith is one of two or three thousand Hadiths authenticated by Al Bukhari and his followers. It was in year 36 of the Hegira - a quarter of a century after Muhammad's death - that Abu Bakra remembered the Hadith in question. Abu Bakra becomes a successor to Ali thanks to his refusal to support A'icha, but especially because of the Hadith he had remembered at a crucial moment to justify his refusal.

In this difficult terrain, Fatima Mernissi questions the texts under the light of historical facts. She revisits the positions of the apostle of God on the equality of the sexes.



**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Habermas Jurgen,” *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into Category of Bourgeois Society* (1989), xix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>4</sup>Habermas, “*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*”, 3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>A Simple Essay, “*Jurgen Habermas and the Public Sphere*”.

<sup>7</sup>Habermas, “*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*”, 27.

<sup>8</sup>A Simple Essay, “*Further Reflections on the Public Sphere and Essay Example for Free*”.

<sup>9</sup>Mernissi Fatima, “*The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*” (1991), 1.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

### III. Results

This research paper compared Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991). As a result, I have found some similarities in relation to the issue of space relying on Jurgen Habermas's theory of public sphere, focusing on the main concept concerning women's exclusion from public sphere. I have mainly highlighted the important concepts of Jurgen Habermas's theory: public sphere, private sphere, bourgeois public sphere and public opinion. As a result, I have noticed that this theory is suitable to my study.

The female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and women in *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) are alienated. They live in a patriarchal society and they experience moments of isolation and marginalization. This current situation gives birth to moments of insecurity and instability inside them. Virginia Woolf and Fatima Mernissi reveal the social position of their female characters that live moments of division. All these circumstances push both Woolf and Mernissi to show their resistance.

In addition, the writers mainly share the same reasons behind writing their works. They tackled the same themes and both deal with the notion of space. Through their works, they show the suffering of women. In addition, both Woolf and Mernissi are prominent figures in the feminist movement that defends women's rights. It is a way for Woolf to speak up her refusal of the suffering of women in the patriarchal society. Mernissi also refuses the exclusion of women from the public sphere. She corrects the misrepresentation of Muslim women by reinterpreting women's position in Islam.

At the end, I have concluded that women in both works suffered from patriarchal societies that prevent them from having access to public sphere since they are deprived of their rights. Jurgen Habermas explains that the public sphere is an area where groups of people are

gathered in order to discuss public affairs freely. Woolf's and Mernissi's female characters want to gain access to public sphere and confirm that even women have the right to participate.

#### **IV. Discussion:**

This section examines the affinities between Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991). It is divided into three chapters: the first one is entitled the Early Influences to Become Writers, the second: Historical and Literary Context and the last one is Ideas of Space in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991).

##### **Chapter One: The Early Influences to Become Writers**

Virginia Woolf and Fatima Mernissi share some circumstances that were a passage to get access to public space. The writers share the same social status since they belong to the class of bourgeois. Both novelists are lucky to be born in an educated family which gave them the chance to break the traditional rules which treat women badly and prevent them from education. In this chapter, we will deal with the circumstances that reinforced their integration into the public sphere as feminist writers and how their position in society help them to achieve their goal; to get access to the public space which is only restricted to the men.

In this sense, Jürgen Habermas describes the public sphere as “The Bourgeois Public Sphere.”<sup>1</sup> This sphere is to show the debate and the discussion of the dominant people. The life of the two writers and what they witnessed during their childhood was of great help in getting access to the world of literature and becoming famous writers.

To start with, Virginia Woolf was born in London on January 25, 1882. Her early life was full of sadness, hopelessness and she suffered from psychological traumas. When she was thirteen, she lost her mother. Her mother's death affected the atmosphere of the family. Thus, Woolf's life begun with gloom and sadness that led to her first mental illness. Two years later, she lost her elder sister, this led to her second mental breakdown. “Virginia Woolf's adolescent

and adult life was interspersed with periodic mental and physical breakdowns.”<sup>2</sup> Early traumas darkened her childhood including being sexually abused by her half-brothers George and Gerald Duckworth which she wrote about in her essay “A Sketch of the Past” and “22 Hyde Park Gate” in 1895. This incident was extremely traumatic for Woolf and all the tragedies and her personal experiences allowed her to write about the hidden suffering that the reader has access to in “A Sketch” to show her image as a child and adolescence.

Even though she was raised in an educated family, she still had to fight obstacles because of the strict Victorian society. At that time, women were not allowed to go to school. As a result, she received education at home, in her father’s library. Leslie Stephen -Woolf’s father- was a man of letters, critic and the first editor of the Dictionary of National Biography. His relationship with Victorian writers helped his daughter to be influenced by the Victorian literary writers. She improved her knowledge in their literate household from which she taught the classics and English literature. Her free access to the library fed her literary luggage and enriched her knowledge about the famous classics of English Literature such as Shakespeare, James Joyce and Henry James who was the great friend of the family.<sup>3</sup> the previous conditions gave birth to Woolf’s admiration, love to literature and inspiration to be a writer.

Her belonging to a gifted family whose ancestors included generations of writers paved the way to her career as a writer. “Intellectuals and creative development were generally encouraged by Stephen’s family environment.”<sup>4</sup> Her father encouraged her to read his works, thus she has a great literary heritage. According to Habermas “The Bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public.”<sup>5</sup> This means the social relationship between the individuals goes beyond the boundaries of their social status. There was an atmosphere of freedom in her family which allowed her to think and develop a desire for writing. The discussion of art and literature was enabling in this atmosphere

of Bourgeoisie and it was from this surrounding that Woolf put together her equipment to start writing and narrated her experiences of life.

After the death of her parents, Woolf moved with her sister Vanessa and brothers to the Bloomsbury Square in London where she met members of the Bloomsbury Group. The group consisted of educated members of the upper class. Woolf became a prominent member in this group besides other artists and intellectuals who had been educated at Cambridge. These members shared a philosophy that “was a basis for a rejection of the Bourgeois ideals of their parents’ generation.”<sup>6</sup> They rejected the old Victorian ideas and adopted more liberal and upgrade attitudes. Clive Bell describes the Bloomsbury as a group who “shared a taste for discussion in pursuit of truth and contempt for conventional ways of thinking and feeling, contempt morals if you will.”<sup>7</sup> It was constituted of freedom where people have right to think freely, described their emotions and discussed their points of view. In addition, “the Bloomsbury group was noted for its liberal positions on many issues, including divorce, adulterating, homosexuality and other matters that often-violated acceptable social norms.”<sup>8</sup> This group started as a weekly gathering, however, as time passed, it became an outstanding salon of ideas and philosophy on art and politics. In this context, it is what Habermas names “the literary public sphere”<sup>9</sup> that is a part of the bourgeois public space and a milieu in which they discussed art and literature.

The group helped Woolf to advance modern thoughts about art and literature. Besides it was there that she met her husband Leonard Woolf who was an author and publisher. They established the Hogarth press that was to bring into light the best and most original works. Through this press, Woolf had a look at the famous writers and was influenced by theirs works. Hogarth Press soon became “more than therapy for Woolf as they printed not only Virginia Woolf’s works but also published in 1919 a volume of seven new poems by T.S Eliot ... also

published works of several foreign writers.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, she began gaining attention in literary circles.

She had a supporting husband who encouraged her to write and helped her to improve her skills to write and work. He devoted much of his time to care for her when she suffered from mental illness. Even after the attempts of her husband to keep her in touch with art and literature, she felt detached and separated from the rest of the world especially the world of literature.

Similar to Virginia Woolf who is from a Bourgeois family, Fatima Mernissi shares the same status. She belongs to a family of wealthy landowners and agriculturalists. This environment is similar to the European Bourgeois family. Fatima Mernissi was born in 1940 in Fez. At that time, the importance of women could be seen according to their status in the family. Poor and divorced women were treated as inferior to married women from upper class families. Fortunately, she belonged to the upper class which prevents her exclusion and even being misjudged.

Despite the differences in geographical era, society and culture, the milieu in which Mernissi grew up from 1940 until independence was the same as Virginia Woolf's. Men dominated women and prevented them from their rights especially to education. Though raised in a privileged surrounding, and removed from the poverty experienced by most Moroccans, Mernissi's childhood was spent in the confines of a harem structure. In this environment, women were limited to the private sphere. Thus, they had to learn embroidery, attending bathroom known as “Hammam” and storytelling. Like Woolf, Mernissi experienced personal traumas during her childhood that affected her to write about them. The harem in which Mernissi grew up was guarded by men at the gate and from which women had to ask permission before leaving. Contrary to other women who were illiterate and controlled by men, Mernissi

escaped this situation, however, the painful manner with which her father taught her the Qur'an returned insistently to haunt her mind.

My father adored me. He used to take me on his mule to the mosque for Friday prayers, and he kept me by his side during long hours of reading or discussions with his friends. The books that he loved and regularly pored over were histories of Muslim Civilization which was his passion. Nevertheless, my father, who adored me, who was immersed in our heritage and impassioned by our civilization, bought me a Djellaba and tried to force the veil on me at the age of four. For him there was no contradiction between civilization, refinement and immuring alive, physically and mentally, a child of the female sex.<sup>11</sup>

This demonstrates that Mernissi suffered from male domination that has control and power over women.

In Muslim culture, women are voiceless and have no right to decide about their future. Men and women are separated; men are always seen superior to women. For men, the best choice for women is marriage and building a family. Likewise, Virginia Woolf shows that "marriage was not an affair of personal affection, but of family avarice."<sup>12</sup> Marriage is not a personal choice; it is for the father to marry his daughter to keep the reputation of the family. So, she has to obey her father's will and later her husband. In the name of tradition, men create family councils to reject all the matters that endanger the survival of men's rules. Therefore, women have no voice, they have no right to share their ideas, they lack education, illiteracy and their parents oblige them to marry early and wear jilbab and Haik.

In the same stream of ideas concerning the authors' early influences, the environment in which both writers grew up can be considered as a milieu that may later help them to write about their personal experiences. As a young girl, Mernissi lived in the harem of her home in Fez, a place in which women stay for the pleasure of men and which consists of an enlarged family. Men oblige women to stay at home in order to exclude them from public sphere.



Although her parents had a monogamous marriage, she grew up living in a harem with her mother and grandmother who was one of her grandfather's nine wives.

Mernissi's masterpiece, *Dream of Trespass: Tales of Harem Girlhood* (1994) is a memoir in which she described her youth in a Moroccan harem in Fez. This work can be seen as an autobiographical account in which she recounted her experiences of childhood in harem life. She wanted to know how frontiers work and "looking for the frontier has become my life's occupation."<sup>13</sup> Her grandmother always tried to explain to her that a harem meant women who had lost their freedom; because she shared her husband with many others and that she said "I'm so happy your generation will not have to share husbands anymore."<sup>14</sup> Mernissi described the inequalities of gender and how the powerful culture and tradition including harem made women unable to get their freedom. In addition "A harem was about private space, and the rules regulating it. It did not need walls. Once you knew what is forbidden, you carried the harem within ... inscribed under your forehead and under your skin."<sup>15</sup> This is what Mernissi means by invisible harem.

In Muslim law "women cannot rule a country"<sup>16</sup>, they are powerless, weak and they have no freedom. Most women in the harem hoped that their daughters would not end like them. Mernissi's mother and grandmother were illiterate; however, they kept fighting to take her to school, to study different fields, to have a better life. They taught her how to do and survive as a woman. They supported her to get higher education so that women could be independent. Thus her family was of great influence and help for her to cross borders and succeed in her life. "Life is looking good for women now" <sup>17</sup> and "with the nationalists asking for their education, and the end of seclusion. For you know, the problem with women today is that they are powerless. And powerlessness stems from ignorance and a lack of education."<sup>18</sup> She wanted her to be courageous and asked her to be strong "you are going to be powerful woman, aren't

you? I would be so upset if you weren't.”<sup>19</sup> She gave her advice in order to reach her goal in life and “there is always a little part of the sky you can raise your head to. So, don't look down, look up, up, and off we go! Making wings.”<sup>20</sup> Her grandmother encouraged her to be different and succeed in life.

Besides, the power of words is very important in the Arab Muslim Society. This gives desire to freedom and “the main thing for the powerlessness is to have a dream. True a dream alone, without the bargaining power to go with it, doesn't transform the world or make the wall vanish, but it does help a hold of dignity.”<sup>21</sup> This shows the importance of words that push women to work and get equality and struggle to have independence. She said about her aunt Habiba;

She knew how to talk in the night. With words alone, she could put us onto a large ship sailing from Aden to Maldives, or take us to an island where the birds spoke like human beings. Riding on her words, we traveled past Sind and Hind(India), leaving Muslim territories behind, leaving dangerously, and making friends with Christians and Jews, who shared their bizarre foods with us and watched us do our prayers, while we watched them do theirs. Sometimes we traveled so far that no gods were to be found, only sun- and fire- worshippers, but even they seemed friendly and endearing when introduced by Aunt Habiba. Her tales made me long to become an adult and an expert storyteller myself. I wanted to learn how to talk in the night.<sup>22</sup>

Storytelling then permitted her to travel so far and know about other cultures, traditions and life styles.

In addition, family, storytelling and education influenced Mernissi as a young woman who searched for equality and freedom. She “has to learn to scream and protest, just the way you learned to walk and talk.”<sup>23</sup> This means that her mother taught her how to act and carry herself as a woman. She was also influenced by “A collection of marvelous tales known by Western readers “The Arabian Nights”, that is a part of life in Islamic world for centuries.”<sup>24</sup>

Through a *Thousand and One Night*, Mernissi's mother wanted to show her how women should act intelligently and how words could save her and others. She said,

As soon as she entered king Schahriar's bedroom, she started telling him such a <sup>2</sup> marvelous story, which she cleverly left hanging at a most suspenseful part that he couldn't bear to part with her at dawn. So he left her live until the next night, so she could finish her tale. But on the second night, she told him another wonderful story, which she was again far from finishing when dawn arrived, and the king who had to let her live again. The same thing happened the next night, and the next, for a thousand nights, which is almost three years, until the king was unable to imagine living without her. By then, they already had two children, and after a thousand and one nights, he renounced his terrible habit of chopping off women's heads.<sup>25</sup>

Scheherazade was a powerful woman who gave “an inspiration for Muslim women who are seeking to take a stronger role in Islamic society without abandoning their religion or their culture.”<sup>26</sup>

Unlike Virginia Woolf who received education at home, Fatima Mernissi had opportunity to carry her studies because the independence of Morocco brought change for women. One of these changes is the ability to go to school and study many fields such as science, math, history, politics...etc. In addition to her progressive father who saw education as important, he permitted his daughter to pursue her studies. Mernissi had received her early education at a Koranic School in which little girls are taught how to be responsible. Later, she moved to study at the Sorbonne in Paris. She attended then Brandeis in the United States where she obtained her doctorate in sociology. This demonstrates that Mernissi crossed borders and “Travelling has played a crucial role in Mernissi's career”<sup>27</sup> because she believed that travelling and discovering the world was the best way to learn. Mernissi is well known in the world and a prominent activist in the Islamic World. She is a recognized public figure in her own country and abroad. Her works have been translated into several languages, including English, German,

Dutch and Japanese. Her main focus was women's issues. Mernissi's works explored gender identity and the status of women in Islam.

As a sociologist, Mernissi has done fieldwork mainly in Morocco. On many openings in the late 1970s and early 1980s, she conducted interviews in order to plan dominant attitudes to women. She did sociological research for the UNESCO as well as for Moroccan authorities. Alem Moulay Ahmed al-Khamlichi and the philosopher Ali Oumlil were Mernissi's colleagues at the University Mohammed V. Both of them helped Mernissi to write her book *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991). Ali Oumlil gave her some references concerning the traditional methodology as regards the sacred texts, the ordering of the suras in the Koran and the dating of them. Professor Khamlichi taught Muslim law at the Faculty of Law of the University Mohammed V. He was also a specialist in problems dealing with women in Islam. He gave her advice, it was him who gave her the idea to write her book "*The Veil and the Male Elite*" 1991 and "It was while listening to him at a televised conference at the Rabat mosque, expounding his views on the initiative of the believer with regard to religious texts, that I felt the necessity for a new interpretation of those texts."<sup>28</sup>

Even if the two authors belong to different space, culture and tradition, the milieu in which both writers grew up is mainly similar.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Jurgen Habermas, "*The Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, translated by Thomas Burger*" (Cambridge,Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>2</sup>Freda J.Fuller.Coursey,"*Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography (2005)*", 579.

<sup>3</sup>Alien Pipett, "*The Moth and the Star: A Biography of Virginia Woolf*" (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1955), 5-7.

<sup>4</sup> Freda J.Fuller.Coursey,"*Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography (2005)*", 579.

<sup>5</sup>Christine Kenyon Jones and Anna Snaith, "*Tilting at Universities': Woolf at King's College London, Woolf Studies*" Annual 16, (2010):1-44.

<sup>6</sup>JurgenHabermas, "*The Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*", translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachussets: The MIT Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>7</sup>kathie Behrens, "*The Bloomsbury group: Its Influence on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Beyond*", Dec 30, 2014.

<sup>8</sup>Clive Bell, "*The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs and Commentary*", 119-120.

<sup>9</sup> Freda J-Fuller. Coursey, "*Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography (2005)*", 580.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Mernissi Fatima, "*Doing Daily Battle: Interviews with Moroccan Women*", trans. Mary Jolakeland(London: The Women's Press, 1988), 13.

<sup>12</sup>Woolf Virginia, “*A Room of One’s Own*” (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 49.

<sup>13</sup>Mernissi Fatima, “*Dream of Trespass: Tales of Harem Girlhood*” (USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994), 3.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>24</sup>CROSSETTE BARBARA, “*Muslim Women Hear the Call of Storyteller*”, FEB.6, 1999.

<sup>25</sup>Mernissi Fatima, “*Dream of Trespass: Tales of Harem Girlhood*” (USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994), 16.

<sup>26</sup>CROSSETTE BARBARA, “*Muslim Women Hear the Call of Storyteller*”, FEB.6, 1999.

<sup>27</sup>Yousfi Yassin, “*Moroccan Writer Fatima Mernissi Discusses Women’s Issues in Rabat*”, March, 20.2014.

<sup>28</sup>Mernissi Fatima, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*", trans. Mary Jolakeland (Cambridge, Perseus Books Publishing, 1991),X

## Chapter Two: Historical and Literary Context of the Two Works

In this chapter, I will deal with the background of Woolf's and Mernissi's works so as to shed light on the reasons and the circumstances that contributed to the writing and the birth of the two works *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991). This section is devoted to discuss the historical and literary backgrounds that informed the writing of both works.

*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) was published 5 years after the end of World War I, and its concern was mainly to deal with the social and financial problems caused by the war. The latter had been always behind the different atrocities that caused people's sufferings. Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) portrays people in hard situations. It described the horror and the cruelty of the war. Bradshaw argues that "the grief of the war was etched into every aspect of post war life."<sup>1</sup> This means that the war still affected the post war generation and its atrocities accompanied them in their daily life.

As the war ended, new problems appeared in the horizon: immigration increased, war veterans-victims of the war- came back mentally and physically injured and unemployment raised. Though there was an important development in art and literature "Jazz" and "Modernism", the horror and the cruelty of the war still haunted the nation and represented a trauma. Woolf's novel shows how much war was destructive. Furthermore, women had been affected by this war since they were either wives of veterans, or daughters of shell shocked people. Woolf shows the cruelty of the war throughout her character Septimus Warren Smith who was a traumatized person who suffered during and after the W.W.I. Its traumatic experiences affected his whole life, especially his connubial one. Consequently, his wife Rezia was also suffering because Septimus spoke only about war and he cannot think about their future.



First World War had an important impact on women. It was during this period that a new movement appeared which was modernism. The latter started in the early twentieth century and marked the end of the Victorian era in England. It was also the end of the Victorian novel. It came as a response to Victorian literature, rebelling against the previous Victorian romantic and realistic forms and it presented a new way to understand the world. Domestic issues shifted by creating other features of writing such as, new themes, forms and styles.

Woolf is considered as one of the pillars of modern literature. She was influenced by Sigmund Freud and Henry Bergson. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) illustrates the modern techniques through which Woolf revealed the suffering of women and explored the “ordinary experience” of her characters using the techniques of stream of consciousness and flashbacks to penetrate the minds of each character. Woolf’s fiction such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) dealt with modernist themes such: patriarchy, suffering, alienation and trauma...

Woolf offered us the possibility to enter the mind of each individual and know more about themselves and about each other. The experience of First World War affected the whole humanity, especially women. John Bourne argues that: “The First World War was truly ‘the Great War’ [...] there were advances [...] especially in Britain and arguably for women.”<sup>2</sup> This means that the war helped women to get new ideas that led to the appearance of Feminism as a movement through which they defended their identity and existence.

Feminism is a modernist movement that appeared in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. It is defined as a movement that struggles to achieve equality between women and men and get rid of male dominance. It is a way to affirm that the female as an individual has her own identity and role in society. Feminism manifests its refusal to female suppression. Its aim is to make women aware of their rights and since women are considered the pillar of society all around the world, they have the right to be included and to participate in different fields of life.

Woolf participated in the suffrage movement; in 1910 she participated in the People's Suffrage Organization for women social reform.<sup>3</sup> As a result, her writings tend to integrate the issues of her time in her works; especially on women's position in society. Her focus was also on the women's exclusion from public activities that was considered as the main point of her interest. Consequently, Woolf was considered as one of the supporters of the woman question. In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), she focuses on the inner lives of women and criticized the patriarchal English society. The latter prevented women from their rights. Woolf's aim is to raise women's awareness of their marginalization and exclusion from the public space. This event gave birth to women's resistance. Whereas, Lady Bruton unlike Clarissa Dalloway was portrayed in Woolf's novel as being more interested in politics than others. She even accused other women especially Clarissa of obedient of her husband.

Morocco was a protectorate of France in 1940. Similar to Virginia Woolf, Fatima Mernissi shared memories about war. The town where she was born was "one of the dangerous capitals of the Christians."<sup>4</sup> The Spanish and the French tribes had conflicts and "almost killed one another when they crossed our frontier."<sup>5</sup> Because no one could wipe out the other, they decided to divide Morocco into two parts as she said;

They put soldiers near 'Arbaoua and said from now on, to go north, you needed a pass because you were crossing into Spanish Morocco. To go south, you needed another pass, because you were crossing into French Morocco. If you did not go along with what they said, you got stuck at 'Arbaoua, an arbitrary spot where they had built a huge gate and said that it was a frontier.<sup>6</sup>

During the war period, women suffered from male domination. Mothers were illiterate, only girls were sent to the Qur'anic school to be taught how to be mothers in the future. Their fathers obliged them to wear the veil and they had to ask permission before leaving. For women "trespassing leads only to sorrow and unhappiness"<sup>7</sup> and travel was forbidden because it "is

dangerous and women can't defend themselves.”<sup>8</sup> This shows the weakness of women and how men considered them as powerless. Her aunt Habiba said that “Allah had sent the Northern armies to Morocco to punish the men who hurt women.”<sup>9</sup>

The good news came after Independence in 1956. It was the beginning of social change. Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Youcef proclaimed himself as Mohammed V and changed his title from Sultan to King. He started to change the traditional education to a modern one like the French system of education. Mernissi claims;

The access of women as citizens to education and paid work can be regarded as one of the most fundamental upheavals experienced by our societies in the twentieth century. By laying siege to the places considered until then the private preserve of men and the privilege of maleness - the school and the workplace- women opened everything up to question, in their personal life as well as in their public role.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, Women were encouraged to get higher education, study many fields such as Science, Math and History. Jürgen Habermas claims that “education was the one criterion for admission- property ownership the other”<sup>11</sup> and “everyone had to be able to participate.”<sup>12</sup> Women should participate in public sphere and get education as men. In addition, they were allowed to wear modern dress and “From then on, there were no more black litham to be seen covering young women's faces in Fez Medina.”<sup>13</sup> Women started to appear with bareheaded and changed the traditional dress from haik to modern outfits. In *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) Mernissi states that;

Marriage is a legal contract by which a man and a woman are united with the view of a common, lasting conjugal life ... whose objective is life in fidelity, purity and desire for procreation by impregnation on a stable basis.<sup>14</sup>

According to Mernissi, modernism in Morocco was rapid, unstable and quickly changed the traditional male and female roles. Education for women had destroyed the boundaries that were between men and women. Similar to Woolf, Mernissi is considered to be one of the major feminist figure in both Morocco and Muslim society. For her, a woman who says nothing is a veiled woman, therefore, she wanted them to end their silence, to speak up and write about themselves. She represented an important voice which empowered women. Mernissi quotes in her work;

We Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride, knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy and human rights, for full participation in political and social affairs of our country, stems from no imported western values, but is true part of the Muslim tradition.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) Mernissi believed that Islam gave equality and dignity for all, for men and women, masters and servants, and blacks and whites, free and slaves, as she affirms: “If women’s rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the prophet... but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of male elite”.<sup>16</sup> This means that the male elite manipulated the sacred texts so as to preserve their social position.

According to Mernissi, Islam gave women the same right as men; there is no difference between them. Both of them are considered as human beings. However, the elite continued to use false hadith to serve their political and economic ends. Mernissi was proud of her religious heritage because women in religious history built society side by side with their male counterparts and they had the right to speak with their Prophet and discuss with him everything.

Mernissi represented the Arab world and she “comes to sustain the people of the Arabian Desert lands, to encourage them to achieve higher spiritual goals and equality for all, in spite

of poverty and the daily conflict between the weak and the powerful.”<sup>17</sup> Mernissi tried always to represent that dream and “fights for her dignity and right to citizenship.”<sup>18</sup> She wanted to find space for women where they could find their rights and live freely.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Bradshaw David, "Mrs. Dalloway and WWI". Published in 25-05-2016.

<sup>2</sup>Bourne John, "Total War: The Great War in the Oxford History of Modern War" ed. Townsend Charles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)137-151.

<sup>3</sup>Make West hues, *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Reading of her Work in the Context of her Life and the History of Emancipation* (Munich: Grin Publishing GmbH, 2008), 8.

<sup>4</sup>Mernissi Fatima, "Dream of Trespass: Tales of Harem Girlhood" (USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994), 1.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid,2.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Mernissi Fatima, "The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam", trans. Mary Jolakeland (Cambridge, Perseus Books Publishing, 1991)23-24.

<sup>11</sup>JurgenHabermas, "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society", translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 85.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>13</sup>Mernissi Fatima, “*Dream of Trespass: Tales of Harem Girlhood*” (USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994), 120.

<sup>14</sup>Mernissi Fatima, “The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam”, trans. Mary Jolakeland (Cambridge, Perseus Books Publishing, 1991)23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Viii.

<sup>16</sup> Mernissi Fatima, “The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam”, trans. Mary Jolakeland (Cambridge, Perseus Books Publishing, 1991) ix.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid,ix.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Viii.

### **Chapter Three: Ideas of Space in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *the Veil and the Male Elite* (1991)**

#### **A- Virginia Woolf's use of Space in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)**

Virginia Woolf is a feminist writer among others who have dealt with the issue of public and private spheres. This part then, aims to highlight Woolf's position concerning the fight to break the patriarchal structure and give women a new identity.

Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) represents her interests in the feminist question and women's inferior position in a patriarchal society. Thus, Woolf insisted on the impact of that society on women's lives. Dr. Isam M. Shihada, in "A Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf's Selected Novels: *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Light House*", argues the two's complicated relationship was against patriarchal traditions and in support of the society of women."<sup>1</sup> During the Victorian era, women were considered inferior and they were excluded from the public sphere. Dr. Shihada claims:

Before the mid of the 19th century, women were considered weak intellectually and physically. Such concept was consolidated by social conventions. According to that concept society was divided into two worlds: private and public world. The private world implied that women should stay at home; they were not allowed to work or learn. They were educated only in a way that suited their claimed weak nature such as sewing, nursing and painting. The sole vocation for women was marriage.<sup>2</sup>

At that time, women were forbidden from education or working outside home, and they had to take care of their children and satisfy their husbands. For this, the only solution for women was marriage that gave them honor and security. Through *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) Virginia Woolf showed that marriage in a patriarchal society was a failure and not a success. Woolf portrayed Clarissa in an inner conflict which resulted in the burden of her choice to marry Richard Dalloway who was meant to offer her freedom. Clarissa was from a middle class and



in order to change her status, she decided to marry Richard, an upper class man. She believed that Richard could protect her whereas Peter could not give her freedom, but she would remain as the other women of that period. Woolf argues:

For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him (where was he this morning, for instance?) Some committee, she asked what. But with Peter everything gone into.<sup>3</sup>

This shows Clarissa's inner conflict between desire for independence and love for Peter.

Women were dependent on men and they were protected physically and financially. However, by the act of marriage they lost their personality and they were weak in men's eyes. Although tradition opposed passion and communication, men considered it as an important element. Clarissa's relationship with her husband is a failure. Richard is preoccupied with politics more than with his wife. Again, he lacked communication, this is seen when he wished to express his feelings to Clarissa and "wants to tell his wife that he loves her"<sup>4</sup>, but due to the "social system"<sup>5</sup> it "can't be said"<sup>6</sup> and he is "shy to say it."<sup>7</sup> Woolf shows that men don't give importance to women's emotions because of the patriarchal society that destroyed unity and the attachment between wife and husband.

The name Mrs. Dalloway was a birth of new identity that shows that she was dependent on her husband. She said: "Mrs. Dalloway, Mrs. Dalloway, not even Clarissa anymore."<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Dalloway was not happy with her new name which made her feel empty without any identity. Thus, she always remembered her youth days in Bourton, remembering her moments of happiness with Sally Selton and Peter Walsh.

Despite marriage, women were not happy, they were neglected by their husbands and this led to their alienation and marginalization. Richard was invited to Lady Bruton's lunch without his wife Clarissa. This shows that society ignores women, since the patriarchal culture

limited women's role to be householders and to serve their husband's reputation. These circumstances brought to women sadness, dissatisfaction and isolation.

Through *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf agreed that in the patriarchal society there was inequality between men and women. Men were seen to be strong and women were weak. Thus, emotions and passivity were connected to women whereas qualities, such as: reason and activities were related to men. Patriarchal cultures value men's qualities; therefore, it helped men to use their position of power to lower women. This society was divided into two spheres, public that refers to men and private that refers to woman. According to Habermas "the private sphere was attached to the house"<sup>9</sup> and he describes "the public sphere as a realm of freedom."<sup>10</sup> As a result, the sole vocation for women was marriage and working at home, whereas for men it was to work and build society.

Mrs. Dalloway was a typical middle class woman who was an angle of the house whereas the husband worked in the public sphere. Through Clarissa, Woolf highlights the role of a perfect patriarchal woman as an angle in the house who supported her husband. Men had a negative image about women; this is viewed in the novel through Peter who described Clarissa as "cold"<sup>11</sup>, "heartless"<sup>12</sup> and "prude"<sup>13</sup>, inside "there is always something cold in Clarissa, he thought, she had always, as a girl a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality."<sup>14</sup> She is treated as inferior and she was seen as "the death of the soul."<sup>15</sup> In the patriarchal society in which Clarissa lived, the masculine was seen as the natural source of power and has authority over women who were seen to be absent and marginalized. Clarissa was "weak"<sup>16</sup> and "in this profound darkness"<sup>17</sup> in which she lived "she had never been so happy."<sup>18</sup> Woolf affirms that women face many obstacles, but they struggle to reach their goals in a society which deprived them from their rights. In addition, they tried to break the traditional boundaries between men and women in order to construct an identity.

At the beginning, Clarissa succeeded to be a perfect hostess in her party, she “did things not simply, not for themselves, but to make people think this or that.”<sup>19</sup> She did this to serve up her husband’s business. Clarissa’s social status depended on her party because if it ends without success “it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong”<sup>20</sup>, therefore “she needed people, always people.”<sup>21</sup> For Habermas “private property wanted to see itself represented as such in the sphere of the bourgeois family and actualized inside the person...”<sup>22</sup> Despite Clarissa’s effort to find her individuality, she failed and” now at the age of fifty three, one scarcely needed people anymore.”<sup>23</sup> Her relationship with others didn’t lead to her identification as a woman who can be free and recognized because of the cruelty of the patriarchal society and the superiority of men.

According to Woolf, men in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) represented patriarchal images. They were the “perfect gentlemen”<sup>24</sup> and “with power”<sup>25</sup> they “can make life intolerable.”<sup>26</sup> Habermas suggests that the dominant elite had a “public reputation”<sup>27</sup> in the “world of work and organization”<sup>28</sup> because they can work and build society and they are seen always the best. Peter Walsh’s walk in London shows his source of power. That is linked with masculinity. He was a traveler and he considered women as subordinate. Woolf shows that male characters represent strength and power like Richard Dalloway who has an important profession and high status, since he is a member in parliament and an active leader in politics. He doesn’t care about his wife and daughter because he sacrifices all his time to politics. He believes in the separate sphere ideology that means women at home, educating children and men outside home in the realm of power.

Through *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf awakens women about their inferior status and helps to offer opportunities for women. She struggles to change their situations and she believes that women should be included in the public sphere. Susan L. Brody claims “in tracing

Mrs. Dalloway's ordinary, 'neither brilliant nor tragic' existence, Virginia Woolf sought to set forth a meaningful place for women in the literature of her time.<sup>29</sup>

Woolf showed that women were not inferior and they should participate in men's world. She wanted to prove that men and women were equal and that what was permitted to men was permitted to women. Therefore, she believed that women and men had a similar access to public sphere especially education. The novel shows a new generation that opposed to the old one. The critic Bebel predicted in 1904, the "education-of the women of the future- is the same as that of man-in which- she chooses her occupation on such field as corresponds with her wishes(...) and natural abilities."<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth –Mrs. Dalloway's daughter- was a great example of the new generation. She was active and intelligent. She had a social position in society and got an academic education that Woolf saw as an advantage for women.

#### **B-Fatima Mernissi's use of Space in *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991):**

Similar to Virginia Woolf, Fatima Mernissi dealt with the notion of public and private sphere in her work, *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991). The work shows that early Muslim Women played a very important role in Islam. Women had access to public sphere and discussed public affairs. Mernissi used historical documents and hadith to support her argument and to show that the real message of Islam was the equality of the sexes. Mernissi attempted to correct the misunderstanding of the role of women. She presented an interesting example of early Islamic women through the wives of the Prophet especially Khadija and A'isha and the role they played.

Early in her book, Mernissi wished to remedy perceived ills and misconceptions of women. Despite the equality of all stated by Islam, men could not accept this equality because

they wanted to be the governing elite. They wanted to dominate women and they manipulated the sacred texts to serve their interests. Umar Ibn Hasin, a companion, said,

If I wanted to, I could recite traditions about the prophet for two days without stopping. What keeps me from doing it is that I have seen some of the companions of the Messenger of God who heard exactly what I myself heard, who saw what I saw, and those men recounted Hadith. Those traditions are not exactly what we heard. And I am afraid of hallucinating, as they hallucinate.<sup>31</sup>

According to Mernissi some companions were biased and they hid reality and said things which didn't exist. Despite all the rights that Islam gave to women, to be equal with men, women were excluded from politics and played no role in public affairs. After the assassination of Uthman, the third caliph, A'isha wanted to take revenge. For her, Ali the fourth caliph was an unjust leader because he did not punish the killers of Uthman. So, she took an opposing army which challenged his legitimacy."It is true that A'isha fought 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib at the Battle of the Camel ... But this individual act of a woman cannot be claimed to legitimate the participation of women in political affairs."<sup>32</sup>This act was considered by the companions as an error because:"Thousand of companions of the prophet were killed .... Scholars, heroes of many victories, eminent leaders lost their lives-all because of A'isha's intervention in politics."<sup>33</sup>

The conclusion for men was to keep women out of politics and that "women were not created for poking her nose into politics."<sup>34</sup>They were convinced that "if A'isha had not intervened in the public affairs of the Muslim state, Muslim history would have taken the path to peace, progress and prosperity."<sup>35</sup> This act shows for men that women should be excluded from the public sphere and be restricted to the private one. Men believed that "Allah created women to reproduce the race, bring up future generations, and be in charge of households."<sup>36</sup>Mernissi tried to correct the perceived inequalities and misrepresentation of

Muslim women by introducing A'isha as an important woman in the history of Islam. She dismissed this idea by showing A'isha's important role in the Battle of the Camel. After the beginning of Islam, A'isha was considered of great importance due to her outspoken nature and in the case of *The Veil and the Male Elite (1991)*, Mernissi introduced her to show her military role in the Battle of the Camel and the courage she had to fight Ali. Mernissi's discussion of A'isha indicates a woman who had knowledge and authority. A'isha's participation in the Battle especially as a leader contradicts the affirmation that women did not play a role in public affairs.

According to Mernissi, Pre Islamic Arabia saw women as polluting creatures. In Islamic space, one can pray anywhere, in streets, garden, mosque ... etc. Abu Hurayra, the writer of prophet's Hadith, declares that the three causes that interrupt prayer are dogs, asses and women. Women were compared to dogs. Yet, women were seen as ill luck. Abu Hurayra used false hadith and said "Three things bring bad luck: house, woman and horse."<sup>37</sup> A'isha refused this Hadith and made a correction for this hadith:

They told A'isha that Abu Hurayra was asserting that the Messenger of God said: Three things bring bad luck: house, woman and horse. A'isha responded: Abu Hurayra learned his lessons very badly. He came into our house when the prophet was in the middle of a sentence. He only heard the end of it. What the Prophet said was: May Allah refutes the Jews; they say three things bring bad luck: house, woman and horse.<sup>38</sup>

Correction such as this was important to Mernissi's argument and her interpretation of Islam. This correction should be included in each Hadith, but it was not the case. Mernissi concluded that even authentic Hadith should be examined and some fuqaha are misogynistic in order to exclude women from the public space. Men do not put women in private sphere only, but they excluded them from their right of inheritance as well as Mernissi argues,

"How", Say men, can one give the right of inheritance to women and children, who do not work and do not earn their living? Are they now going to inherit just like men who

have worked to earn that money? They waited for a rectification from Heaven. Then they said to themselves: “we must go ask for clarification”. And they went to the prophet and asked him some questions on this subject.<sup>39</sup>

Men asked the Prophet if women had right of inheritance. The prophet replied: “Yes absolutely.”<sup>40</sup> He maintained his position about the subject and he told them that it was God decision. Islam appeared as a weapon for women. In Surat An-Nisa (women), God gave many rights to woman. Mernissi claims in her work,

Containing the new laws of inheritance, which deprived men of their privileges. Not only would a woman no longer be “inherited” like camels and palm trees, but she would herself inherit. She would enter into competitions with men for the sharing of fortunes: Unto the men (of the family) belongeth a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and Unto the woman a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be little or much-a legal share.<sup>41</sup>

Mernissi used the Qu’ran to show that God gave women the same right as men. This verse shows that women had the right to inherit like men did. Men could not accept the changes that Islam has brought because they wanted to be always superior and had authority over women.

Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the prophet’s favorite companion believed that

The changes that Islam introducing should be limited to public life and spiritual life, private life should remain under the rule of pre-Islamic customs, customs that Mohammed and his God rejected and condemned henceforth as out of step with the new system of Muslim values, which emphasized the equality of all, including equality of the sexes.<sup>42</sup>

Men accepted Islam as a religion that brought revolution in public life including politics and economy, however, in their family, with their wives and children, they preferred to use the pre-Islamic tradition that gave them power over women and they felt at ease when they dominated them. “We men of Quraysh dominate our women”, he said. When we arrived in Medina, we

saw that the Ansar let themselves be dominated by theirs. Then our women began to copy their habits.”<sup>43</sup>

From here, then started the rebellion against male authority. Women began to have right to say “no” for something they don’t want. This led them to conflicts and disputes with their husbands and sometimes to violence “During a violent dispute an Ansari man slapped his wife”<sup>44</sup> because she was against him and didn’t obey him. This woman went to the Prophet because he was the men in the legal sense. The Prophet hated violence toward women, as Mernissi suggests.

“Do not beat women”. And in fact people renounced it. And then ‘Umar came looking for the Prophet and said to him “Messenger of God, women are rebelling against their husbands”. The prophet authorized them to beat them, but he said: “A crowd of women is gathered tonight around Muhammad’s family. There are seventy women who have come to complain about their husbands.”<sup>45</sup>

During the Prophet’s period women were not beaten and he was always against such act. Mernissi refused violence against women and she justified this by showing the manner in which the Prophet behaved towards his wives “He never raised his hand against one of his wives, nor against a slave, nor against any person at all.”<sup>46</sup>

Before the coming of Islam, women had no identity and were seen as objects. Men sold them or exchanged them with ransom. In addition to being an object, women were considered as sexual desire. Children born of a slave woman and a free father were slaves. Men obliged their wives to be prostitutes in order to have children that they could sell because it was a way to earn their living. Umayna and Musayka were slaves who belong to Abdallah Ibn Ubayyd, a hypocrite man, who forced his wives to be prostitutes. The wives come to complain to the Prophet and it was to answer their protest that Allah tells the verse telling: “Force not your



slave-girls to whoredom that ye may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, if they would preserve their charity.”<sup>47</sup> Mernissi shows that Islam fought such law and women and children had the right to be free as men had.

Mernissi dealt with the private and the public sphere in the life of the Prophet to demonstrate that there is no separation between public and private sphere and women had access to both of them. The Prophet wanted to be successful in his private and public life that he believes of impossibility to separate them. The Prophet’s project is the equality of the sexes. He did not limit his wives to private space and they should staying at home, educating children and doing household duties. They were not considered as sexual object. The Prophet loved his wives and had confidence on them. When he received his first revelation, it was in the arms of his first wife Khadija because he finds comfort with her, as mentioned in the work,

Whom shall I appeal to? Who will believe in me? Muhammad asked her one day during one of the long conversations they had each time Gabriel appeared to him. Happy to see that he no longer doubted his new mission, Khadija exclaimed, “At least you can call on me before all others. For I believe in you!” The Prophet was very happy. He recited the profession of faith to Khadija and Khadija believed.<sup>48</sup>

Before Islam, Khadija was an important woman. After the arrival of Islam, she became a significant women because she was the first person to convert to Islam. Mernissi uses Khadija to emphasizes that the first Muslim was in fact a woman. Besides, it was khadija who asked to the Prophet to marry her. All these events are relevant in Mernissi’s argument to demonstrate that women were capable of doing the things men did in pre Islamic era. Islam started with the Prophet’s loving wife and the profession of Shahada that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet. Muhammad did not separate public and private life. His wives were involved in public affairs and he allowed them to be in touch with Muslim’s affairs. During the whole period of his prophetic mission whether in Medina or Mecca, he gave his wives a place

in his public life and “war did not separate him from his wives. Whether it was on hit-and-run raids or for very long sieges, he was accompanied by one or two of them, chosen by lot to avoid jealousy and rancor.”<sup>49</sup> This shows that the Prophet gave an important place for women to participate in politics and he respected them and avoided conflicts between them. “During expeditions, his wives were not just background figures, but shared with him his strategic concerns.”<sup>50</sup> Before making decision, he asked his wives for advices, he listened to them and negotiated together to find a solution, and when he was lost in what to do, he always confined to his wives, and the author argued that,

After the conclusion of the treaty, the Prophet ordered the Muslims to shave their heads and put themselves in a state of penitence. None of them responded to his call, which he repeated three times. Very distressed, the Prophet went back to the tent of his wife, Umm Salama, whom he had brought with him. When she asked him the cause of his distress, he told her: “I ordered them three times to shave their heads; no one obeyed”. Umm Salama said: “Do not worry at all, Apostle of God, but you yourself shave your head and carry out the sacrifice”. The Prophet stood up, cut the throat of the camel destined for the sacrifice that he himself was to make, and shaved his head. His companions, seeing him do this, spoke of it to each other, and all shaved their heads and sacrificed their animals.<sup>51</sup>

Mernissi demonstrates that men cannot neglect the importance of women because they are intelligent and find always the best solution. She believes that Women play an important role in public sphere from which they should not be excluded.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Dr.M.Shihada Isam,”*In a Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf’s Selected Novels: Mrs. Dalloway and to the Light House*”, 7jan.2005, 132.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. M. Shihada Isam,” *In a Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf’s Selected Novels: Mrs. Dalloway and to the Light House*”. International Journal of Arabic English Studies (IJAES) (2005), 6,121-122.

<sup>3</sup>Woolf Virginia, “*Mrs. Dalloway*”, London: The Hogarth Press 1925. London: Penguin Books, 1996, 10.

<sup>4</sup>Woolf Virginia, “*Mrs. Dalloway*”, London: The Hogarth Press 1925. London: Penguin Books, 1996, 84.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>9</sup>JurgenHabermas, “*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*”, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIP Press, 1989), 68.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Woolf Virginia, “*Mrs. Dalloway*”, London: The Hogarth Press 1925. London: Penguin Books, 1996, 6.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid .

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>22</sup>JurgenHabermas, “*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*”, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIP Press, 1989), 55.

<sup>23</sup>Woolf Virginia, “*Mrs. Dalloway*”, London: The Hogarth Press 1925. London: Penguin Books, 1996, 59.

<sup>24</sup>Woolf Virginia, “*Mrs. Dalloway*”, London: The Hogarth Press 1925. London: Penguin Books, 1996, 56.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>JurgenHabermas, “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIP Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>29</sup>Susan L.” *LAW, LITTERATURE, AND THE LEGACY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF: STORIES AND LESSONS IN FEMINIST LEGAL THEORY.*” Texas Journal of Women & the Law, vol. 21, no.1, 2011, pp.1-45.

<sup>30</sup>Bebel August, “*Woman under Socialism, 1904, in Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*”, edited by VasilikiKolocotroni al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp.60-64.

<sup>31</sup>Menissi Fatima, “*The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*”, trans. Mary Jolakeland (Cambridge, Perseus Books Publishing, 1991), 79.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 52.

## V. Conclusion

This piece of research has dealt with both public space and private one in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Mernissi's *the Veil and the Male Elite* (1991). I have attempted to study space in both works. I have applied Jurgen Habermas the Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (1989) as a theory to analyze this issue through female characters and then examine the attitude of both authors towards it.

Throughout my dissertation, I have dealt with the issue of space in two patriarchal societies. I have shown the relationship between women and space in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf and *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) by Fatima Mernissi. The writers' focus was mainly on women's resistance against patriarchy. Though the two writers belong to two distanced and different cultures, they both share the same harsh experiences related to patriarchy.

Through *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf shed light on the importance of women who became empty souls because of their isolation and marginalization in the different fields of life. Meanwhile, Mernissi's aim through *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991) is to achieve equality between the sexes. Hence, although women of the two works are from different countries and have different cultures and way of life, the surrounding environment in which they lived are mainly similar. Therefore, women in *Mrs. Dalloway* have been as marginalized and deprived from public sphere as those of *the Veil and the Male Elite*. These affinities between the two works which are written in contemporary era have resulted from the affinities of both Virginia Woolf and Fatima Mernissi as their interest on the same issue.

I hope that this research work is helpful for a better understanding of the affinities of the two works in relation to the issue of space. Moreover, I believe that further studies and research can explore other issues in both works such as: feminism and alienation.



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